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ABSTRACT

English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students in general, and Chinese speakers in particular, often omit or misuse English prepositions in speaking or writing. A study traced the history and structure of the English preposition, using contrastive analysis and error analysis to find sources of Chinese error. To determine if Chinese speakers exceed other ESL groups in preposition error patterns, 107 college ESL students (with 14 native speakers as controls) were tested with an open cloze test for preposition use. Results revealed that Chinese speakers had only slightly greater difficulty on the test in comparison with a general ESL group. Vietnamese students scored considerably lower. The Chinese outscored the group overall on questions involving scientific content despite lower overall test scores. The control group outscored all ESL groups but scored lower than expected. The test appeared to have high reliability. A brief curriculum is presented, developed as a result of the study, for teaching prepositions. The Cloze test, test results, and interpretations are also included. (Author/MSE)

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CHINESE SPEAKERS AND ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS:

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Research Colloquium

CATESOL '88

San Francisco, California

by

Diana Lee Vriend

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Abstract

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Statement of Problem: English as a Second Language students in general and Chinese speakers in particular omit or misuse English prepositions in speaking or writing. Sometimes these errors can significantly alter the meaning intended, especially in higher level communication.

Methodology: The project traced the history and structure of the English preposition. It discussed contrastive analysis and error analysis in an effort to explore sources of Chinese erorr. To determine if Chinese exceed other ESL groups in preposition problems, it constructed an experimental instrument, the Open Cloze Test, tested 107 college level subjects, and in the process attempted to establish the credibility of the instrument itself. (The mechanics of the experiment did not conform perfectly to the standards for experimental design in applied linguistics). Finally, the study originated curriculum to offer practical classroom solutions to preposition error.

Data was gathered from print and audio sources. Computer programs were employed for statistical analysis and assessment of test readability and reliability.

Conclusions: Results from administration of the Open Cloze Test to the 107 subjects (14 native speakers comprised a control group) revealed only a slightly greater margin of difficulty for the Chinese speakers when compared to the ESL group in general. The Vietnamese, however, scored significantly lower. In a peripheral finding, the Chinese outscored (by about 5 percent) the ESL students overall on that part of the test with a scientific content although Chinese scores on the test as a whole were lower. The control group topped all ESL groups but still scored lower than expected.

The Open Cloze itself demonstrates high reliability for an instrument of its kind and perhaps breaks new ground in ESL writing-readiness assessment.

The project in its entirety could provide a TESOL instructor with a basic understanding of adult level preposition problems and solutions. The special assessment of Chinese speakers' error may contribute to and stimulate further exploration in the wider prism of Chinese-English language scholarship.

Committee Chair's Signature of Approval Charles A. Moore

FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS

"Good morning, Sue. what will you do your day off?"

"I want to study English, Ann."

"You must have a special reason studying English Sunday," said Ann.

"Yes, I do," said Sue. "Next semester I want to register English 1A."

"Will you study the library or here at home?"

"I have to go the library because the dictionaries that I need are there."

"Why are you always studying so hard? Last night you stayed up 2:00 a.m. I am concerned your health."

"You always tell me, 'watch out your health.' Really, I can take care myself," said Sue.

"Okay. will you be back dinner time? I want to cook you tonight. I will cook your favorite."

"Your're too good, Ann. Yes, I'll be back to eat dinner you. I will shop some food to help you. Bye bye, see you six o'clock tonight," said Sue.

Later Ann heard a knock the door, and went to open it. Her friend Lana walked the room.

" Hello. Ann. Did Sue come back the library yet?"

"No, Lana, she's still studying."

"Oh, I'm really impressed her hard work. All us study hard, but she differs the rest of us. She is so devoted English."

The two friends talked on. They expressed their admiration Sue. They said that Sue would surely succeed. Sue did succeed: her hard work resulted her being admitted English 1A.

FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS

On our tiny planet, spinning an almost circular orbit a nearly constant distance our star, the climate varies, sometimes radically, from place to place. The Sahara is different the Antarctic. The Sun's rays fall directly the Sahara and obliquely the Antacrctic, producing a sizable temperature difference. Hot air rises near the equator; cold air sinks near the poles-- producing atmospheric circulation. The motion the resulting air current is deflected the Earth's rotation.

There is water the atmosphere, but when it condenses, forming rain or snow, heat is released the atmosphere, which in turn changes the motion of the air.

The reason these climatic changes is still serious debate. It may be that the amount light and heat put out the Sun is variable on time scales of tens of thousands or more years. It may be that climatic change is caused the slowly changing direction between the tilt of the Earth's rotational axis and its orbit. There may be instabilities connected the amount of pack ice the Arctic and Atlantic. It may be that volcanoes, pumping large amounts of dust the atmosphere, darken the sky and cool the Earth. It may be that chemical reactions reduced the amount carbon dioxide and other greenhouse molecules the atmosphere, and the Earth cooled.

KEY A

FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS

"Good morning, Sue. What will you do (1) on your day off?" 1

"I want to study English, Ann." 2

"You must have a special reason (2) for studying English (3) on 3

Sunday," said Ann. 4

"Yes, I do," said Sue. "Next semester I want to 5

register (4) for English 1A." 6

"Will you study (5) in the library or here at home?" 7

"I have to go (6) to the library because the dictionaries 8

that I need are there." 9

"Why are you always studying so hard? Last night 10

you stayed up (7) until 2:00 a.m. I am concerned (8) about your health." 11

"You always tell me, 'Watch out (9) for your health.' Really, 12

I can take care (10) of myself," said Sue. 13

"Okay. Will you be back (11) at dinner time? I want to 14

cook (12) for you tonight. I will cook your favorite." 15

"Your're too good, Ann. Yes, I'll be back to eat 16

dinner (13) with you. I will shop (14) for some food to help you. Bye 17

bye, see you (15) at six o'clock tonight," said Sue. 18

Later Ann heard a knock (16) at the door, and went to 19

open it. Her friend Lana walked (17) into the room. 20

" Hello, Ann. Did Sue come back (18) from the library yet?" 21

"No, Lana, she's still studying." 22

"Oh, I'm really impressed (19) with her hard work. All (20) of us 23

study hard, but she differs (21) from the rest of us. She is 24

so devoted (22) to English." 25

The two friends talked on. Ther expressed their 26

admiration (23) for Sue. They said that Sue would surely succeed. 27

Sue did succeed: her hard work resulted (24) in her being 28

admitted (25) to English 1A. 29

KEY C

FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS

On our tiny planet, spinning (1) in an almost circular orbit (2) at a nearly constant distance our star, the climate varies, sometimes radically, from place to place. The Sahara is different (3) from the Antarctic. The Sun's rays fall directly (4) on the Sahara and obliquely (5) on the Antacrctic, producing a sizable temperature difference. Hot air rises near the equator; cold air sinks near the poles-- producing atmospheric circulation. The motion (7) of the resulting air current is deflected (8) by the Earth's rotation.

There is water (9) in the atmosphere, but when it condenses, forming rain or snow, heat is released (10) into the atmosphere, which in turn changes the motion of the air.

The reason (1) for these climatic changes is still (2) under serious debate. It may be that the amount (3) of light and heat put out (4) by the Sun is variable on time scales of tens of thousands or more years. It may be that climatic change is caused (5) by the slowly changing direction between the tilt of the Earth's rotational axis and its orbit. There may be instabilities connected (6) with the amount of pack ice (7) in the Arctic and Atlantic. It may be that volcanoes, pumping large amounts of dust (8) into the atmosphere, darken the sky and cool the Earth. It may be that chemical reactions reduced the amount (9) of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse molecules (10) in the atmosphere, and the Earth cooled.

PREPOSITIONS WITH TIME

FOR

1. ACTION + FOR + TIME emphasizes exact length of time.

Chen comes for one hour to tutor Melissa in Chinese.

For a whole fifteen minutes the infant didn't cry.

FOR + TIME can answer <u>how long</u> in English.

(duo jiu 多久) in Chinese.

You must fast for 12 hours prior to receiving the injection.

She has been working at her new job for three weeks now.

2. ARRANGING TIMES:

APPOINTMENT DATE COMMITMENT	SCHEDULED SETTLED SET (UP)	FOR + TIME

The party is set for 8 pm.

"Mrs. Myopia, we have scheduled you for a 3:15 pm. eye examination with Dr. Monocle."

3. IDIOMS: FOR THE TIME BEING
FOR NOW
FOR A WHILE
FOR A SHORT/LONG TIME

MEANINGS SIMILAR TO 1.

"For the time being, let's put this project on the back burner," said the research director.

"Class is dismissed: that's all on the Revolutionary War for now," said Professor Perez.

***

He leaves for New York in two weeks.

4. IDIOM: IN TIME WITH ENOUGH TIME TO ACHIEVE THE PURPOSE.

Will we reach our flight in time?

********** CONTRASTS: IN/FOR **********

Emphasis

Duration of time	She washed the car for two hours. (It was really dirty).
Speed	She washed the car in ten minutes. (She was fast).
	She ran the marathon in record time.

********** ON **********

1. ON + A DEFINITE DATE

Martin Luther King was born on January 15, 1929.

2. ON + DAY OF THE WEEK

On Thursdays the professor usually gives the class a quiz.

3. ON + HOLIDAY (AT + HOLIDAY is often preferrable.)

On New Year's Eve we will drink, dine, and dance.
On Christmas morning, the children open gifts.
On Halloween, many people go to costume parties.

4. IDIOMS: ON TIME: at the scheduled moment.

ON SCHEDULE: according to the time plan.

Please come on time for the meeting; we begin promptly at 6 pm.

With deficiencies corrected in the space shuttle, the U.S. space launches are back on schedule.

***

BY

1. BY + ANTICIPATED END TIME

(NOTICE TENSES USED WITH BY: future
future perfect
past perfect

By 12 midnight we will give up the search.

By Christmas he will have completed his dissertation.

By the time the paramedics arrived, a stranger had already revived the drowning victim by using CPR.

PRACTICE

Directions: Fill in the blanks of the following passage with at, for, in, in the, or on.

Slavery in America: A Synopsis

_____ the approximately two hundred and fifty years after the arrival of a Dutch ship carrying the first black slaves to America ___ 1616, they were treated as less than human and overworked. Typically, _____ morning they rose to face a day of picking cotton under the sun of a Southern plantation. If they were not up _____ time for for work, a lashing could be expected. _____ noon they might have a short lunch break. _____ 6 pm. their day in the fields would end. Sometimes they worked _____ 12 hours a day. In some plantations, only _____ Christmas or Easter might the cycle of drudgery be interrupted.

_____ January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation

Proclamation, freeing the slaves. Many escaped from their plantations and helped the Union Army. Thus _____ the end of the Civil War _____ 1865, freed Blacks had helped turn the tide of a conflict which had torn country apart _____ four years.

KEY

1. for
2. in
3. in the
4. in
5. at
6. at (by)
7. for
8. on
9. on
10. by
11. in
12. for

Note to teachers: For a more inclusive study of prepositions connected with time, refer to Mastering American English, by Rebecca Hayden et al, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1956. pp. 174--175.

WHAT IS A PHRASAL VERB?

DEFINITION: A phrasal verb is a verb plus one or two particles that together form a special meaning unit.

PARTICLES: The particles are short function words that work as adverbs or prepositions.

EXAMPLES:

do over (repeat) He did his homework over.

break into (enter forcibly) Theives broke into the home.

print out (print from computer) Print the file out.

read up on (study thoroughly) She read up on linguistics.

SYNONYM: Phrasal verbs are also called two word verbs or three word verbs depending on the number of particles.

EXAMPLE

put up with

This three word verb means stand or tolerate (something). As with other phrasal verbs, the meaning goes beyond the definitions of the individual words in put up with.

WORD ORDER: The most common is

SUBJECT	PHRASAL VERB	OBJECT
The boss	cut down	my working hours.

THIS WORD ORDER WORKS WHEN THE OBJECT IS A NOUN (NOUN PHRASE).

However, one kind of phrasal verb must be separated if you use a pronoun as the object instead of a noun or noun phrase.

EXAMPLES OF SEPARABLE PHRASAL VERBS:

SUBJECT	VERB	PRONOUN-OBJECT	PARTICLE
The boss	cut	them	down.
The sun	bleached	it	out.
The teacher	wrote	it	down.
The student	looked	it	up.

This kind of separable phrasal verb is marked

v adv [T]

in the Longman Dictionary of American English (LDAE)
or the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)

TASK: Look up pick up in the LDAE or LDOCE:

pick up v adv [T] (pick sbdy./sthg. ↔ up)

The double arrow pointing in two directions indicates that the object, if it is a noun, can follow either pick or up. (It can follow either the verb or the adverb). As we have learned, this kind of phrasal verb must be separated if we use a pronoun.

EXAMPLES: OPTIONAL SEPARATION WITH NOUNS FOR v adv [T] PHRASAL VERBS

The doctor picked the x-rays up.

The doctor picked up the x-rays.

The doctor picked them up.

The opposites of pick up are also v adv [T] phrasal verbs:

lay (sthg.) down or drop (sthg.) off

TASK: Make three sentences like the ones above with drop off or lay down.

KINDS OF PHRASAL VERBS

DICTIONARY IDENTIFICATION	SEPARABLE OR NOT (+ or - sep)	EXAMPLES (with 1. pronoun 2.noun)
A. v adv [T] pick up	+ sep	1. Pick it up. 2. He picks up the language fast.
B. v prep [T] bear with	- sep	1. Bear with me. 2. Class, please bear with the outside noise.
C. v adv prep [T] brush up on	-sep	1. Brush up on it for the test. 2. I'm brushing up on my Chinese.
D. v adv [I] lift off	-sep	1. The rocket lifted off. (There is no noun or pronoun object).

T: TRANSITIVE--takes an object. I:INTRANSITIVE--takes no object.

NOTE: On category D, "no object means no problem." There is nothing to separate. Category A is the only separable category.

DISCOURSE BUILDERS

The discourse builder is a type of prepositional construction which shapes much of academic and technical writing; it merits analysis and classroom attention. Perhaps the discourse builder has not been isolated as a separate category previous to this writing, but other authors have certainly acknowledged it tangentially. H.B. Heaton in Prepositions and Adverbial Particles includes many prepositional configurations which could be classified as discourse builders. And McKay and Rosenthal in Writing for a Specific Purpose include some discourse builders under the section "Expressions You Need to Know" which follows most chapters. Likewise, McKay, in Verbs for a Specific Purpose, shows how given verbs combine with prepositions to expand their meaning.

DEFINITION: A discourse builder is a phrase consisting of one or more prepositions plus a noun, verb, adjective or a combination of these, which through use, has solidified into a standard expression in acedemic or scientific writing.

Essential to communication, they become the mortar between the bricks of ideas. Or they can actually determine the architecture of the ideas. If one conceives of conveying thought as an organic whole, then discourse builders become the joints which permit the body of knowledge to move in one direction or another. Without prepositions, and discourse builders in particular, academic, business or technical writing would be a formless as a jellyfish.

What would scientific communication be without in proportion to, derive from, or be a function of? Could liberal arts survive without on the basis of, in terms of, or according to? In a random opening of the applied linguistic classic Language Tests at School, one page revealed five discourse builders in two sentences:

> Flanagan showed that this method provides an optimum estimate of the correlation between the item in question and the total test. Thus as in the case of product-moment correlation,... ID can vary from +1 to -1. (p. 251)

Occasionally discourse builders might be considered wordy:make mention of, put emphasis on, and in close proximity to could be reduced to mention, emphasize, and near, respectively. But for better or for worse, discourse buliders abound in most non-fiction communication aimed at college level readers.

This unit will focus on 60 discourse builders, providing examples, a meaning reference, and identification of its parts of speech. The meaning reference is often more of a guide or clue than a definition. The discourse builders are arranged alphabetically by the first main content word.

GRAMMATICAL CONFIGURATIONS OF DISCOURSE BUILDERS

Configuration	Example
adj-prep	basic to, cognizant of
adv-adj-prep	directly proportional to
noun-prep	approach to, motivation behind
prep-adj-noun	in some respects, under X constraints
prep-adj-noun-prep	in close proximity to
prep-noun-prep	with reference to, in the interests of
verb-noun-prep	lend credence to, explore the possibility of
verb-prep	apply to, derive from
verb-prep-noun	arrive at a consensus, come to a conclusion
verb-prep-noun-prep	operate on the basis of
verb-adv-prep	change over from, measure up to

SIXTY DISCOURSE BUILDERS

Item & part of speech	Meaning reference
1. ACCORDING TO (participle)	Basis

According to the data we have collected, we can infer that the desert horned toad breeds with greater frequency under a full moon.

2. ACCOUNT FOR, BE ACCOUNTED FOR (verb)	Reason

Africa's relative underpopulation can be accounted for on the basis of the slave trade. The slave trade, in some measure, accounts for

Africa's relative underpopulation.

---

3. WITH THE AID OF (noun) — Use

Most major companies keep track of their inventory with the aid of computers.

---

4. APPLY TO (verb) — Correspond to, Solicit entry

You may apply that formula to this problem.

A high TOEFL score will permit you to apply to large, important universities.

---

5. APPROACH TO (noun) — Way, means

The teacher had a very practical approach to cooking: learn by doing.

---

6. ARRIVE AT A CONCLUSION / DECISION / HYPOTHESIS (verb) — Discern

After considering a host of facts and observations, the scientists arrived at a hypothesis to be tested in the experiment.

---

7. UNDER THE ASSUMPTION THAT (noun) (relative pronoun) — System, givens

Democracies operate under the assumption that the will of the people is supreme.

---

8. ATTRIBUTE TO, BE ATTRIBUTABLE TO (verb) — Cause

He attributed his lack of energy to depression.

TABLE 2

OPEN CLOZE

PART I (TESTS A & B COMBINED)

MEASURES OF CENTRAL TENDENCY

CLASS	MEAN	STD DEV	VARIANCE	N. OF CASES
1. ESL 600	53.81	16.55	273.86	21
2. Edmunds 2A	58.39	10.88	118.26	13
3. Margruder 2A	71.17	10.14	102.88	12
4. Margruder 2B	77.60	7.25	52.57	20
5. Vriend 119F	75.00	10.69	114.36	12
6. Ching 2A	77.27	9.99	99.78	15
7. Control	87.64	10.62	112.71	14
8. All Groups	70.85	15.95	254.24	107
LANGUAGE GRP.				
1. Chinese	66.45	14.80	219.00	20
2. Vietnamese	61.29	15.40	237.11	21
3. Other	71.89	14.19	201.36	52
4. English	87.64	10.62	112.71	14
5. ESL Only	68.32			93
6. ESL W/O Chinese	68.84			73

(Figures rounded up to nearest hundredth).

All calculations completed by CSUS mainframe computer using SPSS program except for 5. & 6. under language group.

TABLE 4

OPEN CLOZE TEST RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS

	ESL	OTHER	CHIN	VIET	CONTR.	TOTAL POP.
1. Correlation between forms	.79	.84	.71	.76	.93	.76
2. Equal length Spearman-Brown	.88	.91	.83	.87	.96	.87
3. Unequal length Spearman-Brown	.88	.91	.83	.87	.97	.87
4. Guttman Split-half	.88	.91	.81	.86	.72	.86
5. Alpha for Part I	.81	.82	.78	.79	.84	.81
6. Alpha for Part II	.83	.78	.86	.84	.49	.87

TABLE 5

RAW MEANS FOR PART II

(Carl Sagan Passages: Combined C + D)

CHINESE	20
VIETNAMESE	16
OVERALL	19
CONTROL	34
POINTS POSSIBLE	40

MEANS EXPRESSED AS PERCENTS

	Test C	Test D
CHINESE	45%	50%
OVERALL	43%	47%

(Figures by hand calculator)

TABLE 6

ESL ITEM ANALYSIS FOR MOST DIFFICULT ITEMS

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Ref. #	Test #	Chinese Raw*	% wrong	Vietnamese Raw	% wrong	Other Raw	% wrong	Missing preposition
1.	14	.50000	75%	.28571	86%	.51923	74%	for
2.	24	.50000	75%	.28571	86%	.59615	70%	in
3.	27	.50000	75%	.28571	86%	.53846	73%	to
4.	36	.55000	73%	.42857	79%	.61538	69%	about
5.	38	.65000	68%	.76190	62%	.63462	68%	for
6.	44	.70000	65%	.28571	86%	1.03846	48%	of

*2.000 = perfect score.

Items

(14) 1. I will shop **for** some food to help you.

(24) 2. Sue did succeed: her hard work resulted **in** her being admitted (to) English 1A.

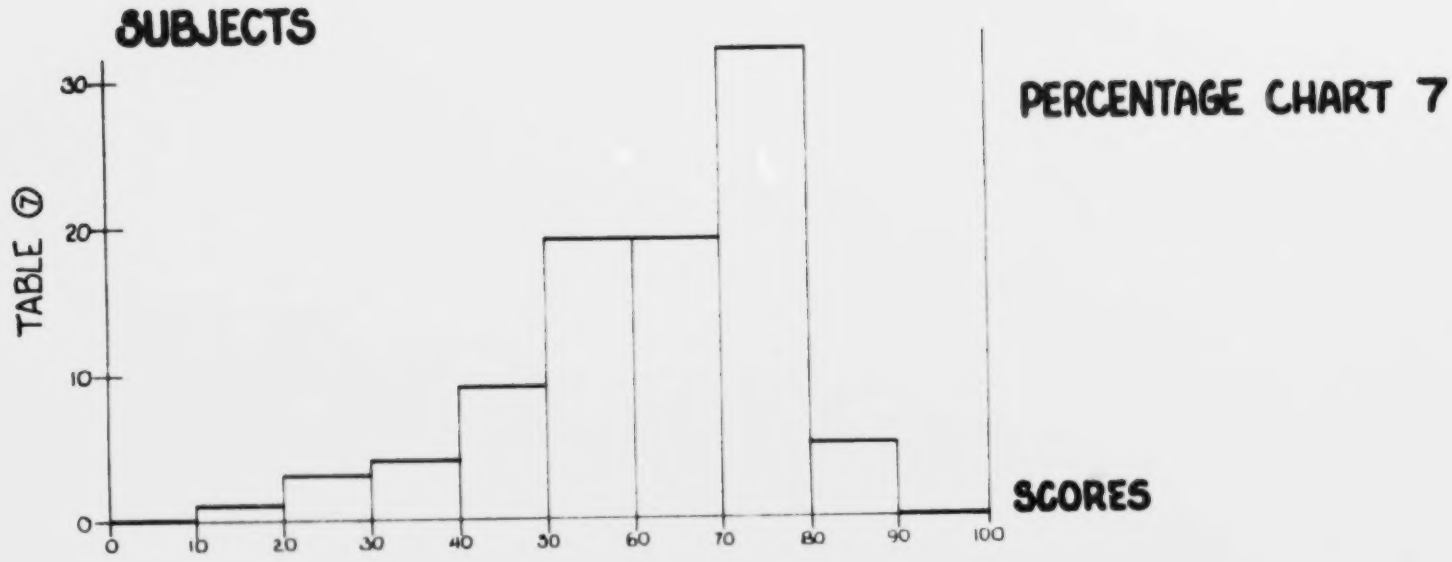
(27) 3. Please excuse me (for) not replying **to** your last letter.

(36) 4. I heard **about** the airlines strike which may happen next week.

(38) 5. Did you shop **for** many bargains.

(44) 6. I have a real admiration (for) the way you are able to take such carefree vacations and sample the **beauties of** tropical places.

Percentages rounded to the nearest hundredth.


SUBJECTS
TABLE ⑦
30
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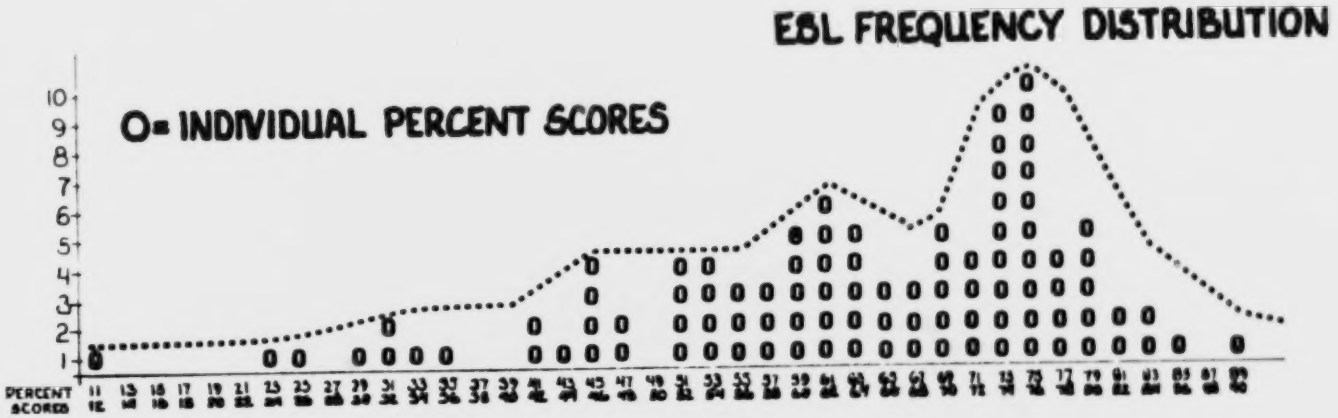
100
SCORES
PERCENTAGE CHART 7

28


ESL FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION
O= INDIVIDUAL PERCENT SCORES
PERCENT SCORES

29